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POEMS

LYRICAL AND DRAMATIC

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W. G. HOLE

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POEMS
LYRICAL AND DRAMATIC

Fcap. 8vo., Cloth. Price 3s. 6d. net.

PROCRIS

AND OTHER POEMS.

"'Procris' is a beautiful poem. The richness and variety of its metaphors, the music of its lines, the fine opulence of its imagery, all seem to point to a new poet. . . . Mr. Hole shows often a rare and exquisite sense of beauty and a marvellous power of poetic vision."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

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POEMS

LYRICAL AND DRAMATIC

BY

W. G. HOLE

Author of "Procris and other Poems"

LONDON:

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1902

For permission to reprint, my thanks are heartily due
to the Editors of "The Spectator," "The Academy,"
"Literature," and "The Pilot."

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TO MY
WIFE

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A GENTLEMAN OF SOMERSET

(In the old Burying-ground at Calcutta)

IN this dark, weed-grown wilderness,
Where lie the dead of yesterday,
There sleeps a warrior Englishman—
A servant of “John Company”—
Who, ere his reckless countrymen
Snatched from the reeking tiger jaws
The fateful prize of empire,
Laid down his life, and saw no more
His home in leafy Somerset.

Though one of that stern fellowship—
That unremembered chivalry—
Whose onset shook the sovereignties
And world-old Powers of Hindostan,
Yet oft in marchings to and fro
His heart, grown sad unwittingly,
Had whispered of the Severn Sea;
And in the moon-blanchèd minarets
Had shown, by wistful alchemy,

The tower four-square upon the hill,
 Beat grey by all the winds of heaven,
 Whose five sweet bells on Sabbath morns
 Make music when the village-folk
 Come up in hushed societies,
 Through lanes of ancient silences
 And primrose-lit obscurities,
 To worship God in Somerset.

Now lies he here, dead utterly,
 His name by fame unchronicled,
 And passed from love and memory;
 For dead his warrior comrades are,
 And dead his friends in Somerset.

Yet still, methinks, half wonderingly,
 Amidst the voiceless multitudes
 Of ghosts that throng the Ganges bank,
 Attaining through the centuries
 The promised palm of nothingness,
 He stands a pale, stern sentinel;
 To God, to England loyal still,
 And to himself, as well becomes
 A gentleman of Somerset.

THE ROAD TO LADYSMITH

GENTLE herdsman, tell me, pray,
 Unto the town of Ladysmith
 Which is the right and ready way?

The way is easy to be gone,
 Although to use but lately won;
 And though across the thirsty waste
 And o'er the veldt but faintly traced,
 For scarce yet green, on either hand,
 Are graves that mark in that new land
 The long, lone road to Ladysmith.

Then tell me, gentle herdsman, pray,
 Upon the road to Ladysmith
 Whose are the graves that mark the way?

The graves are theirs who died to give
 To Freedom room and right to live;
 She called them years and years ago—
 How they made answer all men know
 At Badajos—Trafalgar Bay—
 At Waterloo, and yesterday
 They spoke once more at Ladysmith.

Then, gentle herdsman, tell me, pray,
Now men go free to Ladysmith
If they will rest who made the way?

Ah, pilgrim, never will they rest
While East is sundered from the West;
For they unweariedly must tramp
At Freedom's call from camp to camp;
And many a road for men to tread
Must yet be guarded by their dead,—
As this which leads to Ladysmith.

ROOSEVELT-VILLAGE STREET

NOUGHT is there here the eye to strike—
 Uncurved canals where barges ply;
 A hundred hamlets all alike;

Flat fields that cut an arc of sky
 With men and women o'er them bent,
 Who needs must labour lest they die.

Would any say that lives so spent
 Might break, spurred on by love and pride,
 Their bars of animal content?

Nay, here live men unvexed, untried—
 I mused. Yet pacing Roosevelt street
 In idle humour I espied

A village man and woman meet,
 And pass with never word or sign—
 So strange in neighbour-folk whose feet

Haunt the same fields in rain and shine
 That, curious eyed, in either face,
 In curve of lip, or graven line,

I sought for hints of pain or trace
 Of harsh resolve, and so grew ware
 That hers was as a hiding place

Where lurked the kinship of despair;
 While his bore record deeply wrought
 That life for him had but one care,

And that—to mesh re-iterant thought
 In labour, till at last his soul
 Should find the anodyne it sought.

Hence now with dreary face he stole
 Through Roosevelt street, nor stretched his hand
 To beg from life its smallest dole.

And yet these two had loved and planned
 To happiest end, but for the flood
 That wrecks, upreared on rock or sand,

The house of hopes. Thus—cold of mood,
 He, loving wholly, could but choose
 To deem her heart as his subdued;

While she, as maidens oft-times use,
 Denied sweet proofs of love, was fain
 To gain them by the world-old ruse;

And failing, vexed to find that vain
Was all her pretty reticence,
She happed upon a worthless swain

On whom, reserved the gold, the pence
Of liberal smiles she flung away,
Till, snared by her own innocence,

She fell—Ah God! how far that day
She fell—from hope and promise plumb,
To deeps where lips forget to pray.

But he, apart, with sorrow dumb,
Beheld, scarce conscious of the strife,
Himself in her by fate o'ercome;

And as she passed to her new life,
Righted by still more wrong, divined
Her hate for him who called her wife,

And on the hoarded knowledge pined
And starved, till he, as she, was dead,
And nought remained but to unwind

His coil of days. So with slow tread
He goes his way through Roosevelt street
At night and morn, nor turns his head

When past him comes the sound of feet—
 Of ghostly feet that long ago
 In life had made his pulses beat.

For, mark you, both are dead, and so
 Small wonder is it nought should pass
 Betwixt them in the street, I trow.

Yet still they move with that huge mass
 Of life unpurposeful that reaps
 The corn in season, mows the grass,

And then by right of labour sleeps
 With privilege of dreams that ape
 Fulfilment, whereby each may creep

From pain, through doors of dear escape;
 Save such, unhappy, as would win
 Some respite from themselves, and shape

Those passionate, deep appeals that din
 The Powers, ere season due, to stay
 The long slow tragedies of sin.

CAPTIVE IN LONDON TOWN

THERE comes a ghostly space
 'Twixt midnight and the dawn,
When from the heart of London Town
 The tides of life are drawn.

What time, when Spring is due,
 The captives dungeoned deep
Beneath the stones of London Town
 Grow troubled in their sleep,

And wake—mint, mallow, dock,
 Brambles in bondage sore,
And grasses shut in London Town
 A thousand years and more.

Yet though beneath the stones
 They starve, and overhead
The countless feet pace London Town
 Of men who hold them dead,

Like Samson, blind and scorned,
In pain their time they bide
To seize the roots of London Town,
And tumble down its pride.

Now well by proof and sign,
By men unheard, unseen,
They know that far from London Town
The woods once more are green.

But theirs is still to wait,
Deaf to the myriad hum,
Beneath the stones of London Town
A Spring that needs must come.

SO OLD WE GROW

So old we grow—so old ! yet when
 The deepening sunset speaks no more
 Of days gone by and ended loves ;
 Nor all the young year's joy is dashed
 With grief unspeakable for them
 Who loved the Springs of other years—
 Ah God, how old shall we be then !

So old we grow—so old ! yet when
 There lacks not in the thing we love
 The sweet impossible we missed ;
 Nor grows beside the fount of tears,
 Within our secret souls, remorse
 For love thrice lost since never ours—
 Ah God, how old shall we be then !

THE SIN OF ASCANIO BAGLIONI*

"HAVE I done all that I have done for nought—
 Bestowed upon them lands, emoluments;
 And of mine own free-will made beautiful
 Their naked Duomo, and bid paint within
 The Saints and all their deeds and martyrdoms
 To feed their pride withal? And yet they send
 As with a right denouncing me for sin;
 They—bent beneath my benefits—to give
 The rebel from my hearth undoubting hand;
 Believe her; take the righting of her wrongs
 As their own proper duty! Who were they
 Before I puffed them up; and who was she

* The Baglioni of Perugia were remarkable for their personal beauty and for the ruthless cruelty with which they prosecuted their family quarrels. They exhibited, too, in a very marked degree, that singular mixture of qualities which characterised the Italian nobles of the Renaissance period. These nobles led lives which were often wicked beyond conception, yet they appear to have been peculiarly susceptible to those new influences which were quickening the minds of men; and to their liberal patronage of the arts we of to-day owe more than is generally realized.

Before I snatched her from her poverty
And gave her place and splendour as my wife?

Hark you ! it never was mine to do or give
Without due price exacted. Here I stand,
Duke of Spoleto, Spello and the rest,
Lord of the Umbrian March, and none the less
Perugia's master, though with timorous breath
Rome hints at over-lordship. See, I bulk
So large in Italy that Florence stands
With fear scarce veiled ; Siena, cap in hand,
Awaits my pleasure—strange if I should bend
To priestly insolence !

Hear, then, my tale.

Agnese having died, that stormy mate,
Picked blindly from the black Orsini brood,
Whose fifty thousand golden crowns of dower
Were gravel between my teeth for sixteen years ;
The rumour came that on Vitelli's stem
Bloomed such a flower that though a score of
hands
Had stretched to pluck it, all as yet had failed ;
Whence, since it ever was mine to take the thing
That other men desired, I, too, stretched hand.
Now at that time Siena, simmering ever,
Was hot to overboiling, whence came need
To woo her with a somewhat wary tongue ;
And old Vitelli with his foxy eyes

Had but one price for such a ware—that same
 His own : 'twas clear he had not thought to draw
 So rich a bidder, yet he dared to play
 The indifferent huckster—hold my power so
 cheap—
 I fain had pulled his tower about his ears.

Then when at last I brought her here, my wife,
 Swearing to hold her well in leash, and take
 Somewhat of salve for my bruised dignity,
 I fought rebuff as one who fights with air ;
 For in her eyes was ever confidence
 Of good within me by the world unguessed.
 And would I hold her will in sullen siege,
 Forthwith she marched in perfect panoply
 Of splendid beauty, lovely fearlessness,
 Behind the cannonry of my fierce mood,
 And blew the matches out. Thus at her hands
 So was be-littled my magnificence,
 So was I baffled by cajoleries,
 My wrath gained secret head and I, at last,
 Had given her sharp instruction as to need
 Of wifely deference, but that constant change
 Of mood perplexed me. Sometimes in her eyes
 I but a mastiff seemed, whom she approached
 Well knowing my length of chain, audaciously,
 To put to proof the witcheries of her eyes,
 And all the sweet enchantments of her voice.
 Until, occasion ever too small to seize,

(I gnashing my teeth and waiting time more fit
 To slip the collar), most amazing baulk,
 Most blank impediment, betrayed itself;
 Plain even to my unseeking eyes, a thing
 Incredible, waking laughter, namely love—
 Love strangely shown in ways unlover-like,
 Since lacking all anxious thought for him beloved.
 For what of Silvio Oddi, who for months
 With all his treacherous kin had night and day
 Worked secret mines beneath me, blowing soft
 To keep alight the slow Siena match?
 I willed that he should die, and he had died,
 To my salvation and Perugia's peace,
 But for this spouse, most amorous, who that night
 Meeting my brave—a scoundrel apt to catch
 A hint and shape it to the city's good—
 With sullen face, speeding from word with me,
 Stopped him and haled him, dumb with sheer
 amaze,
 To where I sat, and thanked him in my name
 For this so signal proof of loyalty;
 She having wagered that in all Perugia
 Lived not a friend—her tale—whose love was
 such
 That he would risk his soul for me—Ascanio.

The wretch gazed at me with a dropping jaw,
 And I, nonplussed, avowal impossible,
 Grinned as she took a poniard from her breast,

Blazing with rubies, and with gracious words
 Bestowed it on him, making show of pain
 That such desert should win no better meed ;
 And when he went (I thought he walked away
 Confused, but somewhat more erect) I turned
 Fiercely to stay expected prayers and tears—
 A woman's part in politics—and, instead,
 Met eyes so bright at my discomfiture,
 I could but mask my helpless wrath with smiles.

Nor is this all. Through three unnatural years,
 The Umbrian march untroubled by war the
 while,
 The world has seen me patron of the arts ;
 (I laugh to think that touched with strange
 ambition
 My fingers, too, have itched for brush and chisel !)
 Marble at my command has taken shapes
 Of more than mortal beauty—there they stand :
 Gods of the antique world, saints of the new ;
 Those gazing out from peace the world bestows ;
 These seeking that same peace as gift from
 Heaven.
 Further at my compulsion metals writhe
 In dreadful combat ; clasp and intertwine
 In ancient mirth and love in street and square ;
 While, deftly played on, giving the thing small
 thought,
 I spoke the word and sinuous pipes crept forth

Through fields and vineyards for a dozen miles ;
 Whence now the happy brooks of lonely hills,
 Inveigled, splash and spout in court and lane,
 Pouring continuous joy through triton throats ;
 Then, for my peace, and blushing in face of sin,
 I cleared the town of nesting infamies ;
 And furnished liberal let for brawling blood
 To such good purpose that to-day men walk
 Secure through streets late loud with constant
 fight.

—These things, ye saints, on tablet, plinth, and
 frieze,
 With shameless lettering all ascribed to me !

It pleased the Duchess thus—I, in my sleeve,
 Laughing when men rubbed doubtful eyes at
 proof

That such a thing could be, was well content
 To dance to tunes she called until, aghast,
 I felt beneath my feet the soundless lift
 And stealthy burrowing of conspiracy.
 Then when I would have done what called for
 doing,

The dull deposits of a three years' folly
 Made impotent my will ; on every side
 The saints and martyrs carved at my command
 Stayed me awhile with pure imperative,
 And those grave shapes bequeathed by men of
 Greece,

Who passed themselves, leaving their dreams immortal,
 Within my very chamber stretched forth hands
 Of beautiful restraint.

Then, in dismay,
 I saw the perilous lie my life had grown,
 Bewitched by dreams of bloodless rule, and turned
 From its own law; and driven by panic fear
 To snatch lost power, I set the poisonous yeast
 Of murder working in a brave's dull brain,
 And then appalled had stayed the instant ferment—
 Yet ere a week had passed my foe was dead.

Thus in my own despite relieved—for death
 Had walked in very guise of Providence—
 I swaggered in her presence with intent
 To hide the skulking criminal in my heart;
 But so she read me when from tongue to tongue
 Hissed murderous hint and cynical surmise,
 His blood might visibly have stained my hands.
 Then in my own defence, enraged at sight
 Of sad reproachful eyes, and fearing more
 Betrayal of that dark secret in his face
 Who wrought the deed, I scored the record
 out
 At dead of night beside the Tiber bridge.

I could have wept when in the gloom I heard
 The thankless river smack insatiate lips
 Above my faithful brave—that same whom once
 She had with laughing eyes baulked of old Oddi.
 My secret thus locked up, the key destroyed,
 I faced the Duchess eye to eye, and she,
 As though deceived by my bold show, laid by,
 It seemed, the dark suspicion.

But the deed—

Too strong a food for suckling conscience—
 burst

My swathe of apron-strings; set free my will;
 And thenceforth in that company she loved
 Of eager poets, painters, dull philosophers,
 As a rude host grown weary of his guests,
 I listened to all their jargon distant-eyed,
 With shameless yawns; and having some skill to
 read

The very man, whether of pen or sword,
 Would joy to laugh a flattering rascal red,
 And sneer persistently his panderings dumb.
 When, too, in grave discussion she would turn
 With stately deference to me as one
 Who held the ultimate scale, not once or twice
 Surprising laughter in my eyes she flushed,
 And faltered; then, although with easy grace
 She played the fable through, I knew my soul
 Had reached to evil mastery over hers,

And moved rejoicing in my strength, yet loth
 To spoil, ere yet was need, the pretty play—
 The patron smile became me, sure of power
 To slip the mask at will.

Now, I had marked
 With secret wonder that, though churchmen
 held
 The Duchess as a saint in reverence,
 She gave them alms for sick and poor—nought
 else,
 The Duomo standing bare with mute appeal
 For charity, whereas the city round
 Blossomed to greater beauty day by day.
 And seeing that priests, though but indifferent
 friends,
 Make most effective foes, with hint of shame
 At thought of glory due to God withheld,
 Of my own will I summoned architect,
 Sculptor and painter, workers in bronze and gold,
 And gave them large commission to the end ^{now!}
 That this reproach should cease. “Behold,” I
 said,
 “Neglected in our midst the Duomo stands,
 Stared on by palaces of sinful men,
 Its travertine and sandstone gnawed by years;
 Its poverty apparent. This fit house
 For God who shaped the abundant earth and
 flushed

Her veins with gold ? His should be such command

Of reverence that the proud who now bestow,
High-chinned, a prayer as who would drop an alms

Into a beggar's hand, should, doffed their pride,
Crawl up with tribute to the splendid court
Of their dread sovereign. Troubling with sense
of this,

And fallen on dream, I saw (and look to you
To make my vision glorious in fulfilment,)
The dingy travertine to marble changed:
Not, mark you, all Carrara, blanched and chill
And cold as chastity—to please the eye,
And mortify the pride that girds at joy,
Behold ! that warmer sort which in the sun
Burns like a maiden's cheek but newly kissed ;
Or glows in blood-red dreams of old-time war
In aisles of dusky silence ; eloquent, too,
Of earth's abundant increase—ripening fruits
And golden grain heaped-up on granary floors—
Were priceless blocks warm with the under-gold
Of apricot, shot through with sanguine veins.
Then for the restless prying mind that holds
The earth a palimpsest—things plain to eye
Made dark by hints of words erased beneath—
That sort whose virgin milk-white surface bears
Blunt-penned with liquid sapphire by the gods,
World-ancient secrets ; while for souls content

To take to-day's rich alms in open hand—
 To-morrow not in mind—was serpentine
 Beneath whose polished smooth lie windless dusks,
 Deep in an emerald June where blossoms loosed,
 For ever falling, hang entranced in air.

From these, by magic of my dream, was built
 A fane as like to that which now we know
 As night-clouds to themselves flamed through
 by dawn;
 Yet, since the sight might wake the worshipper
 To rapture more of sense than soul, the awe
 Was ever there of mighty presences,
 For on the shouldered dome-supporting piers,
 Brooding on knowledge of the ways of God,
 Stood grave arch-angels, veiling with backward
 plumes
 The shadowy spandrils; while the vast concave
 Was like the plain of Heaven, through which to
 earth
 Streamed splendidly, with raised enraptured eyes,
 The blessed Saints enflanked by Heaven's high
 Powers
 And angels militant.

But earth no less
 Poured tribute richly, for with fruits at point
 Of ripeness held, pomegranates split in the sun—
 Their hearts revealed—and riotous loops of vines,

The capitals were like to bosky Edens
 From out whose depths the rainbow arches
 sprang ;
 While smooth convolve and intimate intertwine
 Of fluted sister-shafts rose linked and wreathed
 With earthly flowers caught in a breath of
 Heaven
 And made immortal.

Would that I could tell

What else I saw—splendours of Heaven and
 earth,
 Of praise and worship, high self-sacrifice,
 Set forth in frescoes, tarsia work, mosaics—
 Till, drawn by magic of the inlaid floors,
 Amidst whose emblems as with set of tides
 From aisle and chapel, intricate arabesques
 Unfolding ever, ceaselessly evolved,
 Poured confluent through the nave, I saw afar
 The great high altar—glittering as with flame
 Of countless stars in constellation dense
 Caught in a rose-red glory—served by priests
 Arrayed in sacred splendours ; and grew ware
 Of inlaid gems, each span a lifetime's labour,
 Of ivories carved to infinite nicety,
 Of rich embroideries worked by hands elect,
 All culminant and paling in excess
 Of ecstasy about the cross of gold
 Whereon God hung in naked agony.

At clash of bell I turned away and saw
 On candelabrum, screen, and swinging grille,
 Lest men should weary with too constant
 reverence,
 Obdurate metals wrought with skill grotesque—
 Demons let loose from genial hells, and dwarfs
 Tumbling with laughter through a world of
 flowers;
 Or on the pulpit baluster, chin on hand,
 Grinning to see the preacher touch the quick.

But one sole metal struck the master note
 Of this rich harmony—ubiquitous,
 Supreme and seen no less though hid awhile
 As the high sun in his own splendour lost;
 The ultimate cause and crown of goodness—
 gold :
 Red gold to gain the reverence of the rich ;
 To discipline the eyes of avarice,
 And spur the poor with holy zeal to seek
 The Golden City—cup and cope and cross,
 Glowing with pulseless flame on guarded shrines,
 And from God's sanctuary beating back with
 blaze
 Irreverent eyes.

 This dream I give as mould
 For you to pour the gold in. See to it, then,
 That as I spend my treasure, so do you

Spend yours—ay, to the consuming of your souls
 In that fierce flame which licks the flying feet
 Of uttermost beauty. Thus shall I through
 you,

And you through that which makes you more
 than me,

Despair through voiceless lips, and raise aloft
 Weak hands of vain appeal—fit sacrifice
 For men, to whom fruition and content
 Come but with glut of sense, to make to God."

I ceased and watched the working of the charm
 That held enthralled my listeners; of them some
 Had moistened greedy lips at thought of gold;
 The rest, the sneer unheeding, for a space
 Dwelt in an ecstasy on that to do
 Which, reaching small perfection, can at best
 But win the verge of new imperfectness;
 Yea, I myself, consumed by mine own fire,
 Blazing from first intent to work complete,
 Beheld in thought all Italy poured forth
 On pilgrimage to marvel at the sight,
 And read agape the legend wrought in gold
 A hundred times repeated—here concealed,
 'There blazing out on arch and archivolt,
 And now contracted like a watchful eye
 To but a hand-sized monogram on a key-stone,
 Or wrought as by a natural law of growth
 Amidst far-scrolled mosaics, how that I,

With many protestations of humility,
In all had sought God's glory, not mine own.

The Duchess listened near with downcast eyes,
Tapping a jewelled fan upon her knee;
Till I as one but lately come to power,
Who fain would prove his strength, besought
her aid
With unctuous deference. "Leave," she made
reply,
"One little chapel free, lest some sad soul
Have need at any time for prayer," which said,
Gathering her regal train in trembling hands,
She swept from out the chamber.

So deprived
Of needful target for my marksmanship,
I longed to drive the rout of chattering fools
With all their plans curse-pelted forth in flight;
But her I thought of leniently; ay, more,
Was touched by mocking ruth to see her ride
Full-tilt against the Baglioni will.
But having found the secret armour-joint,
I treasured up the knowledge—laughed to think
Her beautiful indifference robbed of sting;
And from that time lured on by wantonness,
With countless prick and stab of careless words,
Discoursing oft with pride on my great work,
I played on her as on a straining string,

And like responsive music was to watch
 The lip's disdain—divine the agony
 Of wrath controlled stinging her heart to speech.

At last so strange a chance befell, I scarce
 Myself had bettered Providence. Amongst
 The gay-winged moths that fluttered round the
 torch

The Duchess held in this dark-walled Perugia,
 Was none so gay as Adone Ridolfi,
 Son of that Guido whom in years gone by,
 I, on some point sufficing jealousy,
 Had spitted in a lonely lemon grove
 An arrow-flight from Arno.

When he first
 With lute on arm approached, and all unasked
 Trolled forth a song that hushed the buzzing
 crowd,
 And roused her grace the Duchess from her mood,
 A sudden terror seized me. I had sworn
 'Twas Guido's self there standing—who had lain
 All through a summer's night with staring eyes
 Fixed on the stars that flame-stab Arno's stream.
 I watched the gallant dumbly: was he not ware
 Who slew his father? Or was I as nought
 Who never yet forgave a man I wronged?
 Nevertheless, I laughed within my beard
 At so superb a folly. It was thus

His father, Guido, once upon a time,
 Had caught old Cosmo's eye and dared his wrath
 With splendid insolence; had been the thorn
 That vexed my pride, for, we together, men
 Had eyes alone for Guido. Now his son
 With old familiar insolence provoked
 My soul with memory of a hated face;
 With that same swaggering trick of leg and cloak,
 And grace insufferable that in his sire
 Had set my teeth on edge.

His song at end,

He bowed a slow, deep bow—so deep, his face
 Darkened between the frizzed-out shocks of hair
 That swept his shoulders; then with hand on hip,
 Erect, a radiant Hercules, with smile
 As one awaiting admiration, stood
 Before the Duchess. She, with face unmoved,
 Dropped slowly cold indifferent eyes on him,
 And instantly in swift extinguishment,
 As with chameleon change, it seemed his golds
 And crimsons dulled to grey; his jewels quenched
 Their living splendours.

Save that then my mood

Was not for laughter, I had laughed aloud;
 Rather, I chose to see the impossible—
 In this encounter palpable mummery
 For my deceiving, and with swift resolve

Assumed the part of simple husband fooled.
 From that time forth, then, having some gift
 thereto,
 I touched suspicion with a far caress;
 Wore fierce incredulous looks, till certainty
 Flooding black passion through my veins (in
 course
 Of skilled gradation), came the time at last
 When, hints of no avail, I needs must speak.

A breath her eyes dwelt on me, their great
 calm
 Scarce troubled till my meaning, like a bolt
 Loosed by a craven hand, struck on her sense.
 I saw her bosom flutter, marked the catch
 Of painful breath; then such a storm as leaps
 Down from the frosty Apennines and strips
 The whimpering leaves of Autumn, wrapped me
 round
 And drove and hustled me forth—a very leaf—
 Denied all logical shelter. She, it seemed,
 Stood steadfast on a needle point of virtue,
 Aloof from her own sex, as if not hers
 To chance on such like sins as other women!

It is no empty Baglioni boast
 That heaven or hell, we care not whose the
 gift,
 So makes our malice dexterous that we strike,

Whom we would wound, with skill that surely
 finds
 The secret weakness.

This Adone, ah !

He, actor too, had eye upon a part ;
 And, if you please, 'twas Paolo he would play
 To her Francesca, save that I, Lanciotto,
 Gloomy of soul and somewhat warped by years,
 Had mind to speak my part in the first act—
 A most fantastic feud to enter on ;
 Yet how it had rejoiced his father's heart
 To see his death avenged with gage thrown down
 Upon my hearth-stone, and before my eyes
 Contemptuous hands laid on my very honour !

I watched him as he aired him in my gaze
 With too-well played indifference ; yet, for all,
 This seeming idle gallant possessed of song
 Such mastery—touched the souls of all who heard
 So subtly—that at times the listeners walked
 Absolved awhile of sin and seeking good.
 (Thus have I seen road puddles, touched by flame
 Of winter sunsets, grow transformed to gold—
 Gold fit to pave Heaven's courts—and still be
 puddles.)
 But there were two who knew him as he was—
 No seraph, but a devil hymning hell,
 To wit, the man himself and I the Duke ;

And maybe, too, the Duchess read him right.
 But he—his part this—blind to her disdain,
 Acted before all eyes the skilful lie
 That open repulse but promised private favour,
 And oft—his part still—smiled with covert malice,
 As one who held what seemed most surely mine
 Within the secret hollow of his hand.

I never yet put trust in chance alone,
 Nor left to time and circumstance the tilth
 Of my revenge. The man I would destroy
 By easy paths, allurements, poisonous pricks,
 Was goaded or persuaded step by step
 On to the pit-fall. Here, instead, I watched
 My smiling foe by ways unknown to me
 Approach unlured the pit I had not dug.
 And thus: I sat one night with chin on palm,
 Dull warmth of anger ripening my resolve
 To bring the farce to end—to raise my hand
 And fillip this teasing housefly from my table.
 Before me moved, crowding the columned hall,
 'The fairest and most renowned in all Perugia—
 A summer sea flushed smoothly over reef
 And gulf and quicksand, lulling potent storms
 Within its bosom. From the gallery spoke
 Flageolet, flute, and viol the intimate speech
 Of secret hearts; while odorous was the air
 With scent of burning cedar and with breath
 Of censers showering out the sweets of summer.

There as I watched the play of tuft and plume,
 The flow of robe which veiling but reveals
 Elusive grace of limb and ivory throat,
 Amidst the press, superbly dominant,
 Flashed this Adone.

He at last called forth
 By one acclaim (the Duchess bowed assent
 So coldly that it spoke but veiled refusal),
 Approached, devouring with insistent eyes
 Her face who sat in pallid sovereignty
 Remote and still beside me on the daïs.

Then with one foot upon the crimson step,
 He touched his lute, and on the listening hall
 Fell soft, as breathes a warm wind from the
 west

With sweet seduction on a flower-bed,
 Setting the blooms luxuriantly anod,
 That fiery song Antonio Strozzi made
 When Sforza clapt him fast between four walls;
 Stole his betrothed, and wooed her, dagger in hand,
 Forcing her heart with fear.

Till then as pale
 Had sat the Duchess as a bride so won;
 But, stung by insult of his song, her eyes
 Flashed flame through lids half-closed, her bosom
 heaved

With that same tumult which o'erflushed her face.

. . . Here was my cue for vigilance, but instead
 Confused as he of Tarsus by fierce light,
 Gazing upon the Duchess, I grew ware
 Of that high, priceless thing, close to my hand.
 So long despised by me as the impossible quest
 Pursued by moonstruck lovers. There and then,
 Seeing myself a fool, I swept aside
 The futile coils with over-cunning set
 About her path; linked soul in soul with her;
 Took place beside her in my honour's breach;
 While so my blood in glad discovery raced,
 So riotous grew my heart, I almost thought
 To see her turn and read with happy eyes
 What had befallen. Ere this, beguiled by ruth—
 Ruth for the beautiful face so bravely held,
 The lips crushed into hopeless silence, eyes
 Denied all sight of what they would, she, still,
 Unswerving and in utter loneliness
 Pressing towards a point beyond my ken—
 Oft had I given and then recalled a gift
 Somewhat akin, but never had I till now
 Myself poured out as wine by maddened thirst,
 Careless of goblet, so it do but reach
 The drouthy lip.

Now with a fearful pride,
 And somewhat of compunctious reverence,

I watched her as the worshipper who waits
 His saint about to work sure miracle ;
 And saw her eyes, as though through arrow-slits,
 Shoot cold unpitying sentence.

Thus he sang
 Weaving a dreadful snare for his own feet ;
 With hand unconscious carding out the knots
 That his intent had been to tangle more.
 He having ceased—and one who would applaud,
 None joining voice, fell foolishly on silence—
 I rose and from a cabinet close at hand,
 Containing store of drinking-vessels kept
 For my own need, took forth a golden cup,
 Wrought by a Florentine (and made complete
 By Roman forethought with a grate which held
 A certain powder, scarce a pinch, prepared
 For such occasions), and presented it
 With gracious smile to the Duchess who, so still
 And pale she sat, seemed like cold marble wrought
 To that high perfect pitch which wondering stands
 Beside the door of life, and waits but love
 To bid it in.

“Signore,” at my words
 The buzzing hall grew hushed, “such wondrous
 skill
 Calls for no common meed, but at this time
 We can but pay scant tithes of those rich thanks

We owe you. ("Fill the cup with wine," a
 page
 Stepped forth), "and, please you, at her hands
 whose praise
 Can but by deeds of noblest worth be won,
 Accept the token."

He at my low bow
 Superbly swept the crimson daïs step
 With plume and cloak, the watchful guests the
 while
 With dreadful fascination holding breath,
 Like to a stricken multitude that waits
 Thud of the headsman's axe, till on their ears
 Fell with the sting of lash on quivering flesh,
 Soft gurgle and gush and laughter of wine
 outpoured.
 Then as the Duchess slowly raised the cup,
 A hundred eyes looked terror in the face,
 A hundred lips in dreadful sympathy
 Smacked sickly sweet of death.

He, drawing nigh,
 In easy gallant mode with hand on hip—
 A very fool as though the loaded dice
 Would fail my practised hand—the Duchess rose
 (Methought a somewhat needless courtesy),
 And spurned her long train back, holding in hand
 The drinking-cup on which a dragon twined,

With rubies set for eyes, and scaly claws
 Fixed fast on stem and bowl, o'erpeeped the brim
 With grim expectancy ; yet undeterred
 He threw the impossible dice with careless hand—
 A bold and swaggering gamester.

She, with eyes

That saw not him, nor me, nor those who
 watched—

A statue yet, that passion still delayed
 I looked to sting the stone to angry life
 At this strange act of honouring him whose songs
 Had set Perugia whispering, held outstretched
 The poisoned cup in clasp so marbly still,
 That never a pulse o'erthrilled with crimson stir
 The wine's dull surface. . . . I had shot
 my shaft,

And now but watched to see it hit or miss ;
 Yet sure its flight had been with means to prove
 That love therein but sought to do her service,
 Not hate to spite her ; that this would-be Paolo
 Should drain the last sweet loving-cup of love—
 Our love—her love and mine.

Then suddenly

As though aroused by sense of watchful eyes
 She turned to me with such imperial mien
 I quailed before her, seeing her something strange
 Beyond my power to read—though woman still

As little the thing that jealousy would have her
 As she was like to that my love would make her,
 Ay, standing there mysteriously aloof,
 To my awed eyes it seemed the cup she held
 More fitly had contained the blood of Christ;
 And had a bell but shrilled, the knees had bent
 And lips had moved of all that silent crowd.

“Signore,” thus she spoke, her voice—a flame
 Fed by unflickering wrath—fell on the hush
 And fiery-toothed bit in the words’ sharp sense.
 “You have sung well, but you have chosen ill;
 Here listening, I have thought perforce of fools—
 Fools honest in their folly we forgive;
 But fools there are who having sinned as you
 To them comes absolution but with blood;
 Thus—” and she spilled in air the ruddy wine.
 “But you—begone: we would be rid of you!”

He started, flushed with anger, then with eyes
 Fast fixed on hers the pride paled from his face,
 His spirit drinking of a deadlier draught
 Than that with which I thought to slay his flesh.
 Pausing a breath, his graceful fopperies
 A gorgeous lie about him, nervous hand
 On rapier hilt, he gazed from her to me;
 I gave him answer with a laughing eye
 And light contempt, while on her face—so fair
 A better man might well have been allured

To crown his name with immemorial folly—
 Was that which held him all too small for wrath,
 Ignored and by disdain itself disdained.

He stood, his face aflush, with folded arms
 And fierce unwavering eyes, then turned on heel,
 Passed slowly down the willing lane through
 which,
 Upon that perilous embassy of Hell,
 He had but late approached her.

At the sight
 So envy filled my heart and fierce regret,
 That hatred ceased (such wealth of splendid
 youth
 Had also once been mine, nor found I joy
 To think my own gold, coined to the uttermost
 doit,
 Had bought the best in the market—all being
 spent),
 As down the crowded hall he flaunted him,
 Furrowing a wave of guests to right and left
 With force of fiery looks. Had I been born
 To such a heritage of hate, thus, too,
 Would I have met defeat—I marked with scorn
 How faces that but late had smiled on him
 Now grinned with secret glee—to change again
 When, pausing by the door, he faced about,
 And splendidly erect, my pack of braves

Snarling at distance from him, broke the hush
 With crash defiant of laughter. Mocking him,
 I too flung laughter back and fierce derision,
 And all the beauty of Perugia paled,
 Huddled in frightened groups, as at the clash
 And horror of swords—yet even while I laughed,
 Feeling my lips curl wolf-like from my teeth,
 My breath was snatched by sight beside the door
 Of Jacopo's fierce eyes fixed fast on mine.

I take the Saints to witness that I then
 Made neither sign nor motion. It had been
 Most strange for me with this new love at stake
 To cross the Duchess—doom where she had
 spared !

Would I not rather, bidding for that or favour,
 Have dared a greater thing and let him go ?
 Ay ! ay ! a thousand times, but that fierce beast,
 That ravening spirit in form of Jacopo,
 Peered in upon my soul with pitiless eyes
 And marked amongst its ardent growths of love,
 His fellow skulking with like rage for blood.
 To keep the twain apart, I had opposed
 Soft flesh to tooth and claw, but, fiercely drawn
 In dreadful recognition, beast to beast
 Flashed forth with rage exultant.

Thus it chanced—

Thus was I helpless party to his death ;
 Yet had the Saints but given my need some share

Of that superfluous aid whence goodness comes
 So easy to the good, I had called back
 The vengeful beast to heel, and been for once
 A not unprofitable ally of Heaven's !
 But down the echoing stairway, through the
 court
 Where Baglioni dragons, lean of claw,
 Upheld a flare of torches, darkly dogged,
 Ridolfi hied him forth to outer night.

He gone, a timorous hubbub filled the hall—
 The sibilant hush and whisper of summer seas
 Closing above a stricken swimmer's head,
 Until fell on my ears the rustle of robes,
 And forth in silence, weary eyes cast down,
 Her ladies following close, the Duchess passed.

Long sat I there meshed in a web of thought,
 And, sick with self-deception, strove to force
 Things that had been shape to the end I would ;
 Again, again I met those murderous eyes,
 Until at last, in thought subjecting them,
 I snatched the hope that even thus my will
 In that late struggle had by chance prevailed.

So, eased of soul, I lifted head and saw
 The empty hall before me half in gloom,
 A sputtering torch above the far door set

Where stood with folded arms some two or
three—

My grey wolves held in leash. Close at my feet
The empty goblet lay, the blackening sprawl
Splashed down from step to step of wasted wine—
The blood of death itself poured forth and spilt.
Up from the stem, it seemed, with steel-sharp
claws

The dragon, emerald-scaled, as though from
depths

Of forest-slime emerged, had slyly crept
To peer across the death-baulked brim at me
With red eyes musing evilly. I swear
I thought the beast alive, so did it seem
To throb with secret malice; so its tongue,
Forswearing sound, shaped to my shuddering
sense

Inevitable words; till, sick at soul,
I turned away—and lo! beside me stood
That low-browed, jag-toothed monster, Jacopo,
Whom, dreading, yet I longed for. “How!”
I cried.

At my rough speech his black brow blacker
grew,
“Pardon, my lord!” he said, “I do but bear
The news that none but I can bring.”

At this,
Struck dumb with horror now too surely ripe,

My eyes encountering his, I shrank as one
Who, seeking herbs beneath the moon, starts
back
At touch of adder writhings.

Then at sign
He hissed resentfully, "There is a lane
That black-mouthed gapes this side La Stalla's
house—

He lies there with, I wit, his last song sung,
Doubled across his lute, its strings for once
Beneath his heart's outpourings strangely dumb ;
Even now the watch make prattle over him."

I rose as one to whom, in act to strike,
Death, staying his hand, had given contemptuous
quarter ;
In sick confusion column and arch spun round,
Framing one baleful visage. "Hence," I gasped,
"Another time—thou shalt have thy reward—
Thou never yet hast failed me—Jacopo !"

Then, stumbling blindly from the hall, I fled,
And flinging me in my closet called for wine ;
They brought it swiftly—fleeing swifter, left
Hush of a charnel-house that, round me closing,
Laid loathsome hands upon my senses ; chilled
Through bone and marrow, cold as midnight
rain ;

Until my soul, cut from all touch with flesh,
 In dreadful hush at grips with fear, thrust back
 Assaulting swarms of horror as a torch,
 Blazing in cavernous darkness holds at bay
 The shadowy hands which would be at its throat ;
 It seemed that all the sins my will had made,
 Resolved on rule, but slaves to gain my ends,
 Slow gathering impetus now dragged me down
 Beyond salvation. Oft, in waking dream,
 I stood upon a high-peaked Apennine,
 Clinging to crack and crevice, on the brink
 Of that abyss o'er which my fellow hung
 Dead at the end of the rope ; but as the staff
 Bent in my hand, about to snap, I flung
 The horror off, and sought to make escape
 In hideous haste through hushed defiles of dream,
 Close at my heels fierce wolves in hot pursuit,
 (I saw their eyes—the eyes of men long dead
 Who once had power to trip the state—or me.)
 With hungry cries, beat of untiring pads,
 Streaming, a mist of death, beneath the moon.

At last, with soul defiant, I turned and dared
 The dreadful phantasies of fear ; flamed forth
 Against revengeful heaven that this, a sin
 Not mine, but born to sin in obscene union ;
 Heaped up—the fruit of unjust usury—
 On sins to answer for, should be God's choice
 For chastisement ; and, bursting from that hell,

I felt warm flesh about me, life still strong,
 My vigilant heart driving with ceaseless blows
 His slaves through all my pulses.

Gazing round

I saw the wicks down-sputtering ; felt the flood
 Of darkness pour so dread an emptiness
 Through the hushed chamber, that with desperate
 hand
 I flung the casement wide—perchance the night
 And all its peaceful stars might soothe my soul ;
 And lo ! above the purple mountains, dawn
 Hung silvery pale—the chaste clean-fingered
 dawn

Wiping the horror of darkness from the world.
 I drank deep breaths of air cool from the snows,
 And sweet from upland pastures bare to Heaven.
 Ah ! what if Hell should pass, itself a dream,
 As that black night, terrible as Hell wore through ;
 And hopeless misery, souls for ever lost,
 Should waken to a day-spring in the vast
 Of endless seeming night, and drink relief
 Blown from the sinless mount where God abides ?

So grasping the wide sill as might the damned
 Claw on the burning brim of Hell, the splash
 Of angry flame about them, while they watched
 Some far pale promise reddening, I dared face
 No more the inner darkness till the dawn

Should succour the life within me. Then, as
 day
 Stole forth—a fearful presence—sparrows chirped
 Waking from night-long silence, and resumed
 Chaffer in spout and bush; while far below
 The upflung fountain that within the night
 Had shivered a restless spirit, caught the sun
 Upon its wavering, crystal coronal,
 And showered the marble steps with silver dust.

So, cheered by customary sight and sound,
 I faced once more the room whose narrow walls
 Had nightlong shut the unmeasured sweep of
 Hell
 About my soul, and lo! the guttered wax,
 Like frozen tears for sorrows long forgot,
 Hinted but drowsy vigil, while sweet life
 Welled up about me restorative with chance
 Once more to grasp at.

Then I made resolve
 (The smell and taste of Hell still in my mouth),
 To mend my ways in God's eyes and in man's;
 To sue for pardon of the Duchess—prove
 That I but sought to manifest my love
 And last, if need, give her in hand the strings
 That move my puppets; bid her be the will
 Behind my will, the power within my power
 (While peace is in the air), that she may feel

The vigorous blood course through the city's
 veins,
 Its evils purged, the beauty of health put on—
 She secret cause of all.

Thus having made
 Amends for sin, not seeing my fears as yet
 Compact of idle dreams, with resolute face
 I bowed the devil, his finger on his nose,
 To fitting place behind me.

But my power
 That laughs at Rome was built in other wise,
 And I had shrunk from such experiment ;
 But three dull years have proved, so firm my seat,
 No forfeit need I fear of dignity.
 From this time forth, then, won to better ways,
 I'd face a world of wolves with greasy smiles ;
 The painful festers of conspiracy
 Should have applied soft unguent, reasonable
 salve ;
 My braves should train the evil hearts of men
 With suave coercion, pleas, sweet urgency ;
 And, beating their swords to trowels, give zealous
 help
 To build the marble city of her dreams.

While thus I patched a treaty with my soul,
 Here snipped, here added, that neither " now "
 nor " then "

Should drive the better bargain, at the door
 Came timorous knocking, and a lacquey's voice
 That Fra Pietro in the vestibule
 Awaited audience—that thin monk whose tongue
 Makes free to lash and flay Perugia's back ;
 Whom even the pious who deem, their sins
 confessed
 And penance paid for, Paradise theirs by right,
 Avoid in fear.

 Soon, face to face we stood,
 Both worn and pale from nightlong vigil, spent
 His with high Heaven, it seemed, and mine with
 Hell.

He was the very picture of a saint,
 Most worshipful—reserved for saintly use
 Of paint and statuary ! His eyes seized fast
 On mine and seemed to fix me in a gaze
 That saw not me alone but all that made
 My world in just proportion ; holding me
 But part of somewhat greater than myself—
 Discomforting and humbling !

 “Peace,” he said,
 “I call not on this house but in His name
 I come whose eyes read all men's hearts aright,
 Not yet to point the writing on the wall,
 But with this warning that the dreadful clock
 Whose soundless wheels measure probation out

To God's true time, upon the dreadful hush
 Of midnight closed thy hour of special grace ;
 That now no more beside thee shall she stand—
 That saint who strove so long with Hell for thee.
 Think not that she has fled, as Lot of old
 Fled from the sin-doomed city ; she had been
 Beside thee still, deeming no gift too great
 Of tender sacrifice ; but Heaven is just,
 And though the angels had rejoiced to know
 Thy soul redeemed from sin, they would not see
 Hers flung upon Hell's counter as the price.

If thou wouldst know at what conjuncture
 struck
 The hour so long delayed, at midnight she,
 Threading the dark that lids Perugia down,
 Thick-clotted with sin, to pray for thee, down-
 cast
 As oft before at her pure soul's defeat,
 Beside La Stalla's house beheld the watch
 With lanterns raised, peering upon the face
 Of one whom she had hated, slain by thee—
 By thine own dagger in another's hand.
 At which dread sight she, fallen upon her knees,
 Accused herself as his prime murderer ;
 For when last night you tempted her, she swears
 That stung by fierce provocative she fell.
 Think not of her as ignorant that the cup
 Contained sure means for her avenging—she

For one brief instant made thy purpose hers.
 But on the very point of act she shrank,
 Seeing with sudden light the deed complete,
 And him, poor fool ! who wronged more wronged
 than she.

Ah, pity, pity ! God's most blessed saint
 Dabbling her hands in blood and seeing therein
 But proof of her own guilt ! Of what avail
 That we regard her but as one distraught,
 Knowing such guilt impossible, when she stands
 Condemned before her conscience—that last judge
 From whom, for such as she, is no appeal.

We have this night, through such an agony
 God grant mine eyes may never again behold,
 Knelt by her with unceasing prayers ; even then
 She troubled with urgent need of Heaven's com-
 passion,
 Yet so oppressed with sweet humility
 She scarce dare ask it, prayed for thee alone.

Hast ever thought what this thing is at core—
 This pitiful folly made large with name of Sin ?
 Dost think it but a breath that dulls awhile
 The glass wherein men seek for the face of God ;
 Or that it passes shorn of consequence ?
 Nay, unremembered sins of men long dead
 Truly, with ours no less, are springs that swell

The poisoned flood that through a thousand years
 Bears soul's miasma, black malarial mists
 To unborn generations.

O ! would I
 Could give thee power to look upon thyself
 From some clear point of vantage whence the
 things
 For which thou deem'st it well to sell thy soul
 Are seen in right perspective. Mark you this,
 The bitterest Hell to which we men can go
 Is that which gives our anguished eyes to see
 How safely possible good had been essayed.
 Yet shouldst thou still abide in sin ; refuse
 Grace that may yet be thine—that grace with-
 drawn,
 Seek not to lean on any bargain struck
 By flesh with soul ; nor think that aught avails
 With Heaven the Duomo yonder grown through
 thee
 Splendid beyond all speech ; but record that
 Of pride that raised a fane and built out God.
 To that same work the Duchess had aspired,
 But ever did she deem herself unworthy,
 Her dear self-chosen task—through God thy
 saving—
 As yet unblessed. Ay, ever it was her prayer
 To see upreared (joint builders she and thou
 In God's eyes one)—each stone a note of praise,

Each upflung shaft a song of glad thanksgiving—
 A church, whose setting should be this Perugia
 Prepared and beautified through silent years,
 Where souls oppressed and weary of the world
 Should seek renewing, and all that heaven bestows.

But thou in perilous service of thy pride,
 Hast made pervert that very soul of art
 Whereby man snatching fearful joy creates,
 And so gives proof of God within himself.
 Thou hast flung dross—contemptuous gifts and
 gold—

In face of the dying Christ, and now art—nay,
 Not mine to say accursed, for this dear Saint
 Still prays for thee and will to her life's end,
 Shut from the world and thee for evermore."

He ceasing, still I kept my head abased,
 For words comporting with my dignity
 Failed then the need. Had he, as such are wont,
 Proclaimed me damned—cut off from common
 hope—

Holding himself aloof conspicuously
 For fear of taint, I had crossed tongues with him.
 I missed the old familiar threat of Hell
 Agape for such as me; the ramp and roar
 Of rough denouncings, facile prophecies,
 But once my scorn nigh flamed to angry speech:
 It was in truth a pretty piece of play

To take my benefactions to the Church
 In one thin covetous hand, and with the other
 Wave off the merit. This, in other moods
 And at another man, I might have flung;
 But Fra Pietro, though he touched the quick,
 Spoke not from heights of righteousness remote;
 Yet with the thought that ill so ill lives not
 But argument amends it, "Fra," I cried,
 Uplifting head, but saw that he was gone.
 At that my spirit sank, for I had hoped
 To gather somewhat further of the Duchess;
 For though I deemed his words not free from
 guile—

Her mention but a move—he stabbed my soul,
 And from its gloom dragged old suspicions out
 Of torture carried past the breaking-point,
 As with a four-pronged spear the fisher prods
 The slime for eels, and hales them writhing forth
 In hydra-agonies. Then, too, I knew—
 Had final knowledge of the naked truth—
 That sin had used as whip to urge me on
 A jealous fear of that last high defiance
 Despair would drive her to, as who should stand
 On final issue back to back with God.

But though the Fra here touched the tender
 quick,
 By what else I have done I dare abide:
 Nor would undo it. Never have I laid hand

To deed, nor brain to scheme, but hand and
 brain
 Put forth full strength unstinted. Good or ill,
 I had some joy—that, maybe, spent—in the
 doing;
 Or else some end to strive for—some great point
 Of policy or safety to be gained.

But one thing men make much of seemed to
 me
 But little worth the winning, and when won
 Less worth the toil of keeping—there I failed,
 Careless of aim, deeming the guerdon vain.
 Alas ! that I should see too late in love
 A thing so needful—know as utter truth
 That though I front the world unchanged,
 henceforth,
 Her memoried beauty shall be bitterness ;
 While I, my hands with baubles crammed, shall
 gaze
 Through wistful silences upon her face
 Remembering sadly what I never knew.

.

Yet even this, hid from the world, is but
 The flaw of little count though passing cure
 The sculptor wots of marring his great work—
 He and none else beside. As for the rest,

A man must will or nill accept his life ;
 Be bound by its conditions—must obey
 Its laws or die. Could, from the empyrean
 dropped,

An eagle sweep and curve through narrow lanes ?
 Hence for the sins now laid to my account—
 That need compelled their doing my one concern ;
 The making of them needful nought of mine—
 I take my chance. And since the character
 Of that whereto we go is all unknown,
 And ‘ Now ’ may well prefigure what will be,
 I see no cause why who plays strongly here
 Need play the weakling there ; further, to God
 Justice is not drawn sharp, unblurred of line,
 But with wide tolerant curves, indulgent loops,
 Sweeps round temptation, motive, circumstance,
 That each be husked, and weighed, and given its
 due.

The contadino sweating on his glebe
 Threads dull monotonous days upon the string
 Of slumber ; sins not, knows no lure of sin,
 Beyond those pinch-beck slips of poverty
 The priest takes payment for ; then, though his
 soul

May swarm with deathly seeds, since no chance
 dew

Falls on them quickening, is he, judged by fruits,
 A better man than I whose sins are forced
 By fructifying showers—who do but sin

Because to sin not were more difficult ?
 If, too, the peasants' alms, though grudged,
 avail,
 Then why are not effectual also mine ?
 Am I, Ascanio Baglioni, damned
 Because, forsooth, I am my father's son ;
 And needs must take my nature as it is,
 Nor even of that be fully cognisant ?
 I would the Fra were here to answer that.
 This self of mine, how long was it a-shaping,
 An unborn ghost, wandering in ancient gloom,
 Mysteriously recipient, as went by—
 With drums and laughter, curses, wails of pain ;
 Turned now to this or that by furious minds—
 The hustling generations till at last,
 Unready and still unripe, Fate called me forth ?

Priest, thou wast right, my sins are not to-
 day's ;
 Adone's blood was shed long years ago ;
 My grandsire slew his father in the grove ;
 The black insurgent blood of ancient murder
 Tides in my veins, and when I stab my foe
 A score of ghostly hands strike home with mine
 Their unseen daggers. Therefore, blame my
 house ;
 For if a thistle grow not figs, I trow,
 He were a fool who blamed the husbandman ;
 Fool, too, the husbandman who looked for figs.

Ah, God ! is this then just that I so placed
 'Thou wouldst behold me other than I am.
 My sires whose souls sucked up from bloody deeds
 Food for their growing, bestowed on me this
 nature—

Hollowed the easy grooves through which my
 will

Moves on with seeming freedom ; wherefore, save
 I tear my very self from brain and bone,
 And scour the haunting taint from out my blood,
 Can I eschew their ways, whose blood and brain
 Are also mine—be other who am, for all,
 Fed from the selfsame founts of ruthless life ?

Thus we, the Baglioni kin, provide—

All fouled with wolf-like passion, athirst for
 blood,

All seeking selfsame ends through selfsame sins ;
 Father and son and son's son doomed and damned
 To one same Hell—a commentary most strange
 On what the churchmen dream of one and all
 With spiritual promptings, strivings, long de-
 spairs,

Winning by several paths to one salvation.

Strange, then, that such a soul as mine should
 mate

With one so saintly, so removed from sin ;
 But stay : her race in evil matches mine ;
 An equal warrant hers with mine to sin ;

(What did I say just now of figs and thistles ?)
 And yet I know the holy angels hung
 Breathless on chance of battle as she fought,
 Flung to the beasts, with blood-stained resolute
 hands;

That now with dear solicitude they watch
 About her as she weeps, her sorrow theirs . . .
 . . . I know not why the rumour of her grief
 (He said she wept) should make so weak my will,
 That now the haftless purpose slips my grasp.
 New, this, to me, to seek for what I would
 In what I must. Had she been treasure—ought
 To hold in hand, possession but the point—
 I know, not I, no power in all the land
 That had denied me. What if I should dare
 Instant surrender—run my banner down !
 Did Baglioni ever do the like ?
 But am I master of myself alone
 To stoop to ancient slavery ? God in Heaven !
 Thou gavest me rule and power—I took Thy
 gifts :
 Poured treasure forth—I filled both hands withal.
 Didst Thou then offer me love—the greatest
 last—
 To prove all others Thy gifts but dross to that ?

Maybe. Yet having gambled from my birth,
 Risked all a thousand times upon the chance,
 I scarce shall be a traitor to myself

Once more to throw the dice. . . . Then,
 pray Thee, bid
 Thy holy angels point not scorn at me,
 That I, in all great issues ranked with Hell,
 Should for a seeming trifle side with Heaven.

Yet he may dare to hope who cannot pray;
 And since but stone walls hold her—not yet
 Death,
 Maybe but man's will bars me—not yet God's.
 Ah! I could pray, but that I know my prayer
 Would flame to curses at the menace of 'no,'
 And in this business I'll be honest with God.
 O! what might I not do did I but know
 That she—that knightly soul so gently housed—
 Would will to break another lance with Hell
 In that hard service once so humbly hers. . . .
 Then down my banner comes. . . . I never
 dreamed
 A man might, making no demand for terms,
 Surrender thus with joy. . . . Is this to lose?

MINE ENEMY

ONCE in my pride I judged a man,
With eyes austere I looked him through;
I said, "Here failed he,"—span by span
I measured all his faults anew.

And thenceforth marked in bitter mood
The manner of his life, intent
To find therein such constant food
That my just heart might not relent.

I probed his thoughts, his motives weighed;
And yet as on his hopes I peered,
Though some I might have crushed, I stayed
My hand—they were so humbly reared.

And keeping watch with doubtful eyes
On all his actions, I began
To mark with measureless surprise
How very human was the man!

Till, by a casual cross-wind blown,
Came word of trifling acts of his—
Poor common things—in which was shown
His touch with common charities.

Then seeing how much I had denied,
Who loved the name of Charity,
I bowed my head with shame and cried,
“Forgive me, O mine enemy!”

TO A BIOGRAPHER

You write his life ! you will but prove
That he was neither saint nor sage ;
Nor will he more our wonder move
Divested of his garb of mage,
And all the trappings of the stage ;

And that beside what he bequeathed
In unexplained munificence ;
Beside the wealth wherewith he wreathed
An empty name with consequence,
The man was an impertinence.

But to your task ; you undertake
From hints of sorrow, strife, desire ;
From what it seemed he held as stake,
To show the man—his force, his fire ;
What lay beneath his soul's attire ;

How he regarded God and man ;
Did he find hard those questions set
Of Life that we as children scan,
Give up and pass with inward fret,
Not learned enough to answer yet ?

But of himself where hides the truth—
 If he knew not, can you decide?
 Did he not deify in youth
 The things in manhood thrice denied?
 Yet who in this would say he lied?

Ah! those unspoken thoughts which made
 The inner man we never knew;
 And all that in the genial shade
 Of his great nature lived and grew,
 From far-off founts their nurture drew.

Nor more of him can you aver
 Than one, who marking from a height
 A distant sail, can say of her
 The port, though hidden from his sight,
 The helmsman steers for day and night.

These well-proved facts, or those—their sum
 Or difference, this or that way read—
 To final truth indeed are dumb;
 Believe me, both of quick and dead,
 Blest are we most in things unsaid.

You loved him and, as friend, were proud
 To know the man behind the pen!
 Then wherefore show him to the crowd,
 When far lies that beyond its ken
 Which made him more than common men?

Nor will our love accept your best
Unless it be, as lovers need,
In such chameleon speech expressed
That each may there, for his own creed,
Peculiar confirmations read.

TO-DAY

HERE, where our hands meet ; now,
When all we touch we see ;
Dearest, I speak to thee—
What answer makest thou ?

Art thou ambassador
From thy mysteriously
Compacted selves to me,
With love to bargain for ?

Is ' now ' so raised above
The sum of all thou art,
That thou canst bind each part
Henceforward fast in love ?

Those selves, say, will they frown
Or smile upon our play,
Till, tired, they turn away
And ring the curtain down ?

The powers no answer make
That we have knowledge of ;
The voices known to Love
Are silent for Love's sake.

For it were hard to live
Knowing thy smiles a mask;
And what I fain would ask,
A gift not thine to give.

Therefore the truth to know,
Of Heaven I will not pray,
So that I keep to-day
The love thou canst bestow."

WINTER SLEEP

THE ancient Earth is still,
 Heavy with winter sleep ;
 And as a man grown rich
 Delights in memories
 Of his old poverty,
 He sees himself, in dream,
 In tattered gabardine,
 Bereft of all his wealth,
 Naked before the stars,
 Asking an alms of Heaven.

And, masquerading thus,
 He thinks with secret joy
 Of his rich treasure-house
 Heaped up with precious ore
 Of yet unminted leaves ;
 Where, worked by willing slaves,
 The urgent shuttles fly,
 Shedding from unseen looms
 The wondrous woven webs
 And stainless gossamers
 For which are dyes distilled
 In crucibles occult

From sunset blazonries ;
And where have hushed increase
The unbreathed melodies,
The uncensed incenses,
The wild unburgeoned pomp
Of Summer's pageantry.

Thus, as a King disguised
In garb of beggary,
His unsuspected robes
Concealed by piteous rags,
He threads the ways of space ;
And naked are his arms,
And empty are his hands ;
While oft he hides his mirth
When alms are thrown to him,
And ruth is moved by sight
Of his great poverty.

THE MASTER OF LIFE

I AM the plough,
Master of Life,
Where my sharp coulter leads
Ceases sterility;
And, by my largesses
Gladdened and satisfied,
Follow the peoples !

I, in the glimmering dawn,
Furrowing circlewise—
Leaving wide gaps where Death
Swung his black gates anon—
Traced the foundations where
Rose the proud battlements,
Bastions and walls round
The City of Life !

To me for charity
Come the worn mendicants,
Footing it painfully
Out from the darkness

Into the silence—
Here are my alms for you
Poured forth abundantly—
Yours while the earth knows
Summer and winter,
Seed-time and harvest—
Eat and be glad !

Egypt and Nineveh,
Rome and Assyria
Were but my pensioners ;
I am the permanent,
Still stand my kingdoms—
Still wave the cornfields—
Seeming but slave indeed,
Master of Life am I—
I am the plough !

THE NAIAD TO THE HAMADRYAD

"AH happy, thou ! loosed from the bonds
 that hold
 So long and wearily. How must thine heart
 Have beat on that wild noon when—all the hills,
 Obscured by mist, huddling beneath the storm—
 A fiery bolt fell on thy bondage-house,
 And blinding smoke hung thick in all its courts
 Of whispering foliage. Didst thou not then
 watch
 Those shattered limbs with hope that nevermore
 The leaves might come again ? And when they
 came—
 When all the myriad hands that held thee thrall
 Unfolded tender veils of jealous guard,
 Unwitting of thy sorrow, thou didst weep :
 Long years ago was that ! Now, Spring in vain
 Calls loud what once had filled thee with despair,
 For hushed and dead—a bare anatomy
 Amidst the wakening woodland—stands thine
 oak.

Where thou dost go, I know not ; yet would I
 Go with thee though thy journey be but that

The leaves in Autumn make; for I too know
 A change—am henceforth cut from fellowship
 With my swift waters. Time was when I flashed
 From pool to pool, disturbing, as I passed,
 The sleep of silvery fishes; or in nooks
 Of alder-shaded gloom at ease reclined,
 Through breathless noons joined in the hushed
 cabals

Of waters gathering secretly, and schooled
 Their lips to whispering mockery; while at
 night

I splashed the reed-marg'd spaces where the
 moon

Mused on her mirrored face. But all is changed
 Since when I saw a maiden hand in hand
 Pass with a youth—she giving such joyous heed
 To his sweet whispered words, they might have
 fallen

From lips divine. These as I watched, desire
 For self-same joy possessed me, and my life,
 As dream by dream obscured, thenceforth was
 changed—

So changed, I might have worn an alien face;
 Been strange to all the waters whom I loved;
 For ever at my approach their conclaves hushed,
 Broke up and hastened on with stifled murmurs;
 The anchored lilies looked askance at me,
 And I, more to myself a stranger than to them,
 At war with fate, moved through familiar ways

An unfamiliar spirit. Exiled thus,
 I strove to pluck the madness from my heart,
 But wandering once where forth from out the
 gorge
 The stream, escaped, spreads wide in dimpling
 loops,
 Splashed through the shallows such a youth as he
 Of whom I dreamed. At sight of me he paused,
 While I, confused with sharp and sudden sense
 Of that past madness—all that wild desire—
 Mine eyes abased.

(Ah, sister, then indeed,
 Better had I bethought me of myself—
 I of immortal, he of mortal birth !)
 But when he spoke and asked with eager breath
 Swift questions and, confused by his own speech,
 Marked not the lack of answer, all my being,
 Thrilling as leaves that hushed winds touch at
 night,
 Sloughed off impatiently its ancient peace.
 (Strange this, to thee, dear sister ! who hast
 known,
 Shut round by ceaseless change from year to year,
 No change within thyself.) Then when the sun
 Flamed on the down-thrust lip of yonder vale,
 And spite of sweet farewells he held me still,
 I broke away with laughter, flinging back
 The promise, vainly sought when prisoner held,

To meet him once again, and lay that night
 Training my heart, grown tremulous with joy,
 To climb this new-found pathway to the heights
 Of mortal love, till day woke tardily
 And slowly waxed to noon, whereon I sped,
 Swift as a swallow, down from pool to pool,
 And hid me for the joy to watch him glance
 With pale expectancy this way and that.
 Yet fearing doubt of me, with sudden haste
 I thrust aside the long green droop of vines,
 And, lo! so great a gladness lit his face,
 I fain had veiled me in the leaves again,
 Until, drawn near, he drank with eager eyes
 The light in mine, whereat, surrendering all,
 I there and then had paid the utmost price
 To love and to be loved of human right,
 Willing to barter all that mortals dream
 So high a joy for that which mortals know
 Is joy indeed.

Ah, those delicious days!
 The watchful stars, like close conspirators,
 Made slow the ripening of the dawn; but noon,
 Once come, slipped down between the hands of
 joy
 Like water lightly held where we abode,
 Possessed by thoughts beyond the grasp of speech;
 The stream, its uproar hushed, entranced the air
 With softest music, slipping down its course

Like wind through smooth pipes blown; the
 cooing doves
 Each other chid to silence in the trees—
 Ah, to have held at poise that ecstasy;
 Have touched it to a marble changelessness!
 But we, maybe, must needs be ever strange
 To such fierce joy, lest, burning down, it leave
 Unbearable the pulseless calm eterne.

Thus, holding self-commune behind the mask
 Of mortal maiden, fearful lest the charm
 Should pass while yet his breath upon my cheek
 Shaped the impetuous syllables of love,
 I heard him whisper how, where past the gorge
 Through fruitful fields the stream makes placid
 way,
 His father's house stood empty save for him—
 (Ah, sweet to hear him strive with difficult
 breath!)

No dowry did he ask beyond the love
 Already sure. . . .

I touched his eager lips
 To stay the hurrying joy—to feel, know all,
 And lose no whit, checking the wastrel thirst
 That had upon the instant drained the cup.
 O sweetest draught, held to my burning lips,
 And then denied—dear cup of passing joy!
 Of which to drink had given me power to share

What mortals know and, maybe, too, the right
 To what at last, I think, makes nought to them
 The dread of outer darkness.

Thus made glad
 With longed-for joy within my reach, I wept;
 Standing before my love, I wept for joy;
 "Ah love, dear love!" I cried, "the things
 wherein
 My life till now has found content must pale
 Before such joy as this; but when I do,
 As do I must, thy will, I die to all,
 Trusting through love alone to live again."

He listened, deeming haply that I spoke
 Of worldly state resigned for love of him;
 And I, who fain would do as mortals use,
 Bade him prepare, for soon his father's house
 Should cease to bear reproach of emptiness.

Escaping then, I fled with careless feet;
 Now lingering where a noiseless falling spray
 Kept low-drooped ferns a-nodding or, with eyes
 Fixed all unseeing on an emerald marge,
 Heeded the joyous music of my heart;
 Until within a cave where, bubbling up,
 A spring made silvery whispers all night through,
 I heard a sound of sibilant scorn poured forth

On heaven's high gods—how even great Jove
 himself
 Had stretched immortal arms to mortal joys—
 And strove to stop my ears but, all unchecked,
 The words, so subtly breathed, enmeshed my
 will.
 Then when, with wrestlings fierce, I fain had
 cried
 To that new power which bound me, dreadful
 sense
 Of listeners multitudinous held me dumb;
 While all the dark was troubled with furtive
 breath
 Of many waters gathering—till on all
 Fell sudden hush as though a door had shut.

 Held fast thenceforth by powers that quench
 the stars,
 I slept beside slow changing forms that reach
 Obscurely up through dark from death to life;
 The moons unhasting waxed and waned with
 nought
 Of argent invitation as of yore
 For my unanswering spirit; things I loved
 Called secretly with mournful forest lips;
 Primroses pale grew paler, and then passed
 And came again with wonder, but once more
 To fade unseen; the tall narcissus drooped,
 Grown weary of his beauty, and reborn,

Arrayed in youthful radiance, watched anew
 What I so oft in ruth had spared his eyes—
 His own de-flowering glassed ; and yet I slept.

At last, as might a seed, a-dream too long,
 Deaf to the call of spring, I burst my bonds ;
 And, striking up through deeps of silence, heard
 Familiar sounds of water hurrying past,
 And made amazed discovery that the woods
 Were bare ; that naked limbs and vines leaf-
 stripped
 Made knotted net-work round the cavern mouth ;
 'The stream called loud with mockery in its voice,
 Its ancient mirth by ; while cruel derision
 Shrilled sharp about the lips of pebbly bays.
 Then with dull fear and strange presentiment
 Of unknown ill befallen, I sought the ford,
 And heard while still afar the ceaseless roar
 And thunder of the gorge.

There, too, was change,
 And winter unaccountable. The trees
 That had but late shut round with generous arms
 So rich a world were leafless, and where once
 Had Love breathed urgently moved but cold
 lips
 With weary skeleton speech of joy outlived.
 Passing from place to place, I called his name ;
 " My Larmio, say, is yesterday forgot ?

The night with all its hours has passed away,
Let it not seem that morning finds thee changed !”

Then threading through the angry-throated
gorge,
Whose showers of spray upflung rain back in
drops
Pungent with scent of pine, I reached at last
The lonely firs that shudder where the stream
Leaps down exultant to the plain. Beneath,
The myriad water-voices shrilled and droned;
While far away, within the folded hills,
Nestled the homes of men. There, as I stood,
I watched in deep amaze an old, old man
Toil up the path, led by a little lad,
And marvelled at the sight of burdening years
Pressed like a thumb upon an insect's back,
About to crush the life out.

Gained, at last,
The lower valley lip from which are seen
Remote in mist the far Thessalian hills,
Peak beyond peak, he paused awhile for breath,
Grasping with bony hands his ashen staff.
I saw that, dark in light, his sightless eyes
Were towards the valley turned, his face, intent,
Speaking of sense that gathered in all sound,
As one who sifts the drifted river sand
Seeking for grains of gold. Then drawing nigh,

I wondered if the joys of mortal youth—
 The fruits that we immortal may not taste—
 And that last balm of weariness, even death,
 Were worth so great a price !

At my approach,
 With speech deliberate, "Stranger," thus he
 spoke :

" Mine eyes no longer tell me of the world ;
 But things I once thought dumb discover speech ;
 And thou, I know, but late hast passed still banks
 Of nursling violets in that lonely vale
 Where this wild stream ingathers from the hills
 The tribute of their waters. Tell me, then,
 Such words and whispers as have struck thy
 sense ;

Increased from lip to lip, from leaf to leaf ;
 It may be thou hast caught with careless ear
 Some sound significant to me alone—
 Somewhat that heard by me had touched to sense
 What else were meaningless."

"Thou speakest truth,"
 I made reply, "yet much he hears and sees
 Who walks the world and fain would see and
 hear.

Thou wouldst not have me give thee all the
 chaff

For chance of casual grain ? "

He, listening, seemed
Like to some sculptured shape whose steadfast
eyes

Change not through all the slow eroding years,
Within a murmuring grove of sacred trees.

Then answered slowly, "Time was, years ago,
When such a voice in such a place as this
Had stirred my heart once more with fruitless
hope.

Yet didst thou know wherefore I climbed this
path—

I, blind with years—thou couldst but deem me
mad.

I pray thee then believe I had for end
To muse beside this stream which once I loved.
O bitter sweet ! O most delicious grief !

To hear in darkened age the self-same voice
That sang of love in youth, sing the same song
Unchanged with changeless note, yet changed in
all,

Chaunting of things for ever strange and far,
And purposes defeated by the gods."

He spoke as one in dream, but I—I knew.
I saw my love again, despoiled by years,
And cursed the powers whose spite had done this
thing;

Had bit deep in with tears upon his heart
Knowledge of what was mine alone to learn.

“Tell me thy grief,” I cried, “I, too, who
 speak,
 Sorrow for things withheld from me by fate.”

“Yet each man’s grief,” he said, “is for him-
 self

To bear as best he may. At that high noon
 When youth with richest glory crowned my life,
 I met a maiden wandering where this stream,
 Burst from the gorge, finds momentary peace.
 It is not meet that I with years so stricken
 Should more declare of her than that to me
 She seemed no mortal but some goddess drawn,
 Her soul insurgent at monotonous calm,
 To watch with curious eyes the ways of men;
 That after sweetest wooing she besought
 One night for self-commune and then, forsworn
 Her heritage, would look to love for all—
 Ah me ! my father’s empty house in vain
 Called through the years for life, as day by day
 I waited her return and, day by day,
 Hallowed the far-off morrow with the dream
 Of dear fulfilment. Now once more I come—
 Mark well and mock me—lured by auguries
 Which fired my blood at morn but fill, at eve,
 With desolate sense the stream’s voice which
 had been
 My daily salutation and farewell,
 When I would hear what I would hear or nought,

And see what I would see or else be blind.
 But all things come to end, and I would bid,
 Ere yet the outer darkness closes in,
 That last farewell which rounds all mortal
 dreams."

("O sister ! though thy heart knows nought
 of love,
 Canst thou not guess how great a grief was
 mine ?")
 "Listen," I cried, "I bring thee news, though
 late ;
 I knew this maiden—marked her fruitless tears
 When Fate had made her seem untrue to thee . . .
 O thou strong heart ! go forth whene'er thou wilt
 On that dark journey mortals make alone ;
 This ineffectual truth thy benison :
 That she who loved thee once loves now no less,
 If they whose hearts are silenced still can love,
 For she is dead—dead long ago—to all
 Save hope of knowledge that thou dost forgive
 her."

Then Larmio, rising, stretched a trembling
 hand,
 But spoke no word. To me it seemed the sun
 Of ancient summer struck upon his face
 A frosty beam of that far prodigal joy ;
 But as I watched the little lad draw near,

Grown weary of his play beside the stream,
 Whereat I moved away, but by the cliff
 Which like a wrestler throws with mighty thigh
 The headstrong waters half across the vale,
 Pausing I turned to mark the last of that
 Now dead for ever. At that moment he,
 Informed by inward vision, cast aside
 His knotted staff and called, thin hands out-
 stretched,
 "O stay, am I not Larmio?"

"Ah dear love,"

I cried, "And I am she whose love was vain;
 And swiftly back to him I sped, at which,
 O'ercome with sudden joy, he sank to earth.
 Most gently, then, I laid upon my breast
 The snowy head, and held the wasted hand—
 The hand that once so strong had given me
 strength
 To die that I might live. There, as I knelt,
 I scarce could see his face for blinding tears—
 The tears of grief, well-nigh unbearable,
 For human strength and beauty brought to
 nought;
 For men who feel their life and hold it dear,
 Passing to death before their own sad eyes.
 But therewith came sharp sense that my dreams,
 too,
 As his had ending here; that mortal lot

Was mine at least in that. Then on the air
 Fell hush as when the stream in winter time
 Grows dumb with ice, and far and farther still,
 I heard the lad run crying through the woods,
 And knew that this was death.

O happy he,
 To sink through death into the arms of Love;
 To lie for ever clasped about by Love,
 His dream ensured and changeless! What were
 grief,
 And lonely watching, so there came at last
 Love in the guise of Death, or Death as Love,
 And then forgetfulness? Would but the snows
 On far Olympus cease; the myriad springs
 Close lips awhile on all the morning hills;
 The rain and dews forego their ministries,
 That I might, too, look in the eyes of Death,
 And dream of Love. Alas! this ceaseless flood
 Is but a throbbing vein flushed by the beat
 Of the great heart of the world, and needs must
 flow
 From glimmering dawn to eve, from eve to dawn,
 While still that heart beats, till at last my mind,
 Uncharmed of all its memories, shall return
 To that long vacancy it slipped awhile.

But now within the starless void the hills
 Take visionary shapes and lift their brows

High into heaven ; swiftly from out the east
 Hurry the wakening bird-cries, passing on,
 A clamorous wave, westward across the world ;
 And night, pricked by a myriad points of song,
 Steals to the silent depths of woods profound.
 Soon we . . . Stay, sister ! . . . but a little
 while. . . .

Nay, wilt thou go, and must our ancient love
 Die with the past in which we both had part ?
 Now thou dost turn with bright expectant eyes,
 With dainty feet, and kirtle lightly held,
 To meet the red-lipped sun, and then . . . Ah,
 then ?”

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

THE Kelt lies fast in his grave on the wind-
swept fell;
And he looks with the eyes of the grass
On the clouds as they seaward pass;
And he hears with the ears of the crags
The sigh in the mere-fringe of flags;
And he says, "Lo, the dream that was life still
abides in the world—
It is well!"

The Roman lies bound in his grave by the
master spell;
But he hears with the ears of the blast
The far-striking legions march past;
And he sees, trumpet-stirred at the dawn,
The world's ancient battle-fronts drawn;
And he says, "As of old, scream the eagles of
war in the world—
It is well!"

The Saxon lies, too, in his grave where the
 plough-lands swell;
 And he feels with the joy that is Earth's
 The Spring with its myriad births;
 And he scents as the evening falls
 The rich deep breath of the stalls;
 And he says, "Still the seasons bring increase
 and joy to the world—
 It is well !"

The anchorite lies in his grave by the mouldering
 cell;
 And he looks with the eyes of the stars
 On the soul with its cob-web bars;
 And he hears how, impelled by old hope,
 The multitudes hungering grope;
 And he says, "Still they seek what is not in the
 gift of the world—
 It is well !"

And the living man looks from his place betwixt
 Heaven and Hell;
 And he thinks of the sorrows of old
 That sank into silence untold;
 And he hears sharp attenuate pain
 Crying out to the darkness in vain;
 And he asks, "If we suffer such profitless grief
 in the world—
 Is it well ?"

But God hears the dead, and the woes that the
 living men tell;
And He sees how unconsciously man
 Pieces out His inscrutable plan;
And He knows how at last through his pain
 Shall be made the interpreting plain
Of the benison breathed by Himself at the birth
 of the world—
 “It is well ! ”

THE MIDNIGHT SKIES

To finite minds there can but be
The finite in infinity ;
And as within its system's space
Each planet has allotted place,
The whole must be a continent
Within undreamt-of limits pent.
Again, if that be true indeed,
That all the stars together speed
For ever through the empty vast,
One must be first and one be last.

Then, as the midnight skies we scan,
Think of that star which leads the van ;
Flung back by whose huge prow the seas
Of terrible tranquillities,
Aroused to ineffectual storm,
Surge round the stars that following swarm,
In new amazement, till the last
Pale laggard of them all is past ;
And all the fiery furrows fade
God's worlds in splendid passage made.

GYGES REPLIES TO THE QUEEN

According to Herodotus, Candaules, King of Lydia, was so enamoured of his wife, that he extolled her beauty in exaggerated terms to his favourite, Gyges, and at last insisted on his hiding in the royal sleeping apartment, in order that he might be finally convinced. Gyges, after vainly fighting off this proposal, consented. Unfortunately he was observed by the Queen, who sent for him on the following day, and, after protesting against the indignity to which she had been subjected, gave him the alternative of suffering immediate death, or of killing Candaules and taking possession of her and of the kingdom of Lydia.

Sardis. A room in the King's Palace. Gyges, after a long silence, turns to the Queen, who, seated, resting her elbow on her knee and her chin on her hand, watches him steadfastly without apparently heeding his words.

I hear, most gracious Queen, and having heard—

So rich the spell of beauty, and so strong
The lure of power; reason so full and just
Inspires thy words—what can I but obey?
Yet as I stand, held fast and meshed about
By blazoned coils—a quivering serpent head

Upreared above me, lingering on the blow—
Before thou strikest, hearken !

When, last night,
I hid at that fond fool, thy lord's command,
Unconscious that already had his plan
To prove thy beauty been betrayed to thee,
Didst think, what time thou laidst upon the
chair

Thy rustling glories—slipped the snowy webs
That shimmering down, still moulded to thy
form,

Embraced a scented emptiness—didst think,
Slaking thy thirsty pride with such a draught,
That love wrought treason in my blood? Nay!
Nay!

With loyal eyes watching thee move still Queen,
I did but hold thee worthy of the king ;
And him in love most fortunate of men.

O well bethink thee, Queen ! what is the rule
Of half a fearful world to one man's love?
Queen thou art now—will queenlier state be
thine

When men look on thee, horror in their eyes ?

(Aside.) *She turns, droops languorous lids, smiles
murderous thoughts,
And now hath kissed the air with blood-red lips.*

*Hearken, ye Gods ! by all that men hold dear,
 I love her not ; I envy not the king ;
 I covet not the kingdom . . . but—my life—
 And honour—what were honour lacking life ?
 Honour at best would give me but to die—
 I—Gyges—meshed in silken toils and stabbed
 By slaves in some dark shambles ; whence it seems
 That if defending life of honour shorn
 I strike dishonourably, I do but choose
 Between the greater and the lesser ill ;
 For he on whom dishonour falls in death
 Is held by men in far off time as nought
 But shadow of his shame.*

Have mercy, Queen,
 This thing is murder thou wouldst have me do ;
 Have I, a fighter merely, loathing lies,
 Forced smiles, false hands and all conspiracy ;
 Content to serve so that it be with honour—
 Have I fought battles ; snatched at perilous fame,
 To be at last—what thou wouldst have me be ;
 And do what thou wouldst will ? O, loathful
 me !

Who, no quick insult stinging at my heart,
 Nor blinded by fierce purpose and ambition,
 Needs crawl 'tween scented hangings ; peep
 through chinks,
 Biding my time to strike, and then emerge
 The master of this realm and, dearer prize,

Of her who feigning sleep beside her lord,
 Listened with eager ear till his deep breath
 Became the slow delicious pulse of sleep;
 Of her whose stealthy lift of hand made sign
 To beckon the dreadful shadow from the shade;
 Who glanced from shadow to her lord and back,
 Expectant, pitiless.

O, unsay those words,
 Such horror cannot be! See, on my knees
 I make appeal—I at whose whispered name
 Pale Fear stalks lonely on the Lydian march—
 If there be aught of mercy in thy soul,
 Relent and spare him; yet, if his strange crime
 Calls still for just revenge, revenge itself
 Unites with mercy pleading for his life,
 That not one tittle of that worse than death—
 Thy scorn for his great love—be spared to him.
 Yet should this deed be done, from that day
 forth
 Thou shalt be changed from all that now thou
 art;
 Thy children shall reproach thee with his eyes;
 Shall shock thee with his voice, until at last
 The clinging touch of helpless little hands
 Shall be an agony too sharp to bear;
 And then—and then—they took their life from
 thee—
 It scarce were theft to take thine own again . . .

(Aside.) *Laughter, ye Gods! as though I whispered words—*

*Soft honeyed nothings—in a maiden's ear;
The long insistent spell of radiant eyes,
And lure of smiles . . . O, out upon this fiend!
Death in her kisses, murder on her lips!
Even thus, with this sharp tongue whose speech
direct
Brooks no reply, I answer.*

[*He draws his dagger, advances a step, and then
pauses irresolute, held by the Queen's eyes.
After a long silence:*]

Pardon, Queen!

The heart this dagger threatened was mine own;
Most truly it deserves such chastisement;
For all forgetful of its mean estate,
Fomenting hot rebellion in my blood,
It steals away with half my force to thee.
Wherefore, betrayed by part, and all suspect,
I yield; for power like thine who may withstand?
When thou dost smile a king's decree goes forth;
Thou speakest—kingdoms totter to their fall!
Who then am I to face thee, eye to eye,
As though in power thine equal? I, indeed,
Am like a beggar who at dead of night,
Groping to his dark kennel in the lane,
Haps on the treasury of the king unbarred,

And, entering softly, fingers in the gloom
The spoils of kingdoms—gems and idle coins
Splashed in dull flame along the secret floors ;
But who, his wallet stuffed, turning to flee,
Hears in the dark the low door grind and close,
And knows himself caught like a rat in a trap.

Thus stand I now, in sick expectancy,
Before a fateful door whose silent bolts
Clench fast in adamant, and lo! there comes
From out a gloom so hushed it can but cloak
Menace of murder, unseen watchful eyes,
A voice that says, "Fear not; this wealth is
 thine,
Do thou but pay the price."

And what a price !
When sword meets sword there wakes a kind of
joy
That blunts the bitter point of enmity ;
And him we hated, proved in desperate death
Of noble worth, we mourn as one we loved.
But this fond fool—this simple-hearted king—
I loved him as a brother. When we spoke
Of war and state, and I with angry gusts
Swept all his empty reasonings aside,
He never checked me with, " I am the King."
But as a tolerant friend, to whom the mood
But roughly husked the spirit, heard me out.

This is the man from whom I must steal all—
Must pilfer lustless and ungreedily
Life, love, and kingdom.

Well, indeed, it is
Thou bidd'st me steal upon him while he sleeps.
I could not bear that he should see my face
And know me thief and traitor ; and for fear
Lest in his agony he should call on me—
The friend who loved him, neither more nor less
By reason of his kingship—I will haste
The dreadful work. Then thou who light'st
this hell

Within my bosom, see that thou take not
As flattery that thy beauty was the bribe ;
Say rather that thy minions at the door,
Sworn to thy bloody will, compelled the deed.
Yet shouldst thou dream that fear had part
therein,
Then be convinced it was for love of thee—
That, lusting for the queen, I slew the king. . . .

Thou smilest, Queen . . . such smiles make
murder just,
Whence, so condemned, most justly dies the
king . . .
This night . . . I will not fail thee . . . gracious
Queen !

DEAR LOVE, COME BACK !

HE will come back to me ;
I shall hear him pacing to and fro,
Weeping, weeping bitterly,
Because he loved me so !

O, can he know how small a thing
Would give my spirit rest ;
How that in death itself we cling
To what in life was best !

Dear love ! come back but once to me ;
I would hear you pacing to and fro,
Weeping, weeping bitterly
Because you loved me so !

DEUS MISEREATUR

(Suggested by "Scenes in Slum-Land.")

"KEEPER, I, of him?" in vain
 Answered thus the ruthless Cain,
 Ere he passed with branded brow
 From Thy presence. God! art Thou
 Changed from what thou wast of old,
 That the latter Cain, grown bold,
 Slays or lets be slain the poor,
 Fearful of Thy wrath no more?

O, be merciful to us!

Forth we send on every tide
 Men who preach Thee far and wide;
 While at home in lane and slum
 Seethes a blacker heathendom,
 Where, held fast by bitter need,
 Civic sloth and private greed,
 Souls the Saviour died to win
 Foul the nation's heart with sin;

God be merciful to us!

Thence unceasing, night and day,
 Lips that never learnt to pray,

Shrieking curses, utter yet
 Truths that Thou dost not forget—
 Truths Thou wilt repeat stern-lipped,
 When we stand before Thee stripped—
 Naked souls—no longer men
 Proud of place and pocket—then,
O, be merciful to us !

Yet even here, their spirits pure,
 Children, for a time secure,
 Move with wonder-haunted eyes,
 Fresh from far-off, holier skies ;
 These make no appeal—are dumb,
 Knowing not what needs must come—
 Needs must come ? And Thou didst fold
 Such within Thine arms of old !
God be merciful to us !

“Surely that which is, is best.”
 Thus we speak whom Thou hast blest,
 “Nature’s ways are like to these—
 Hers, indeed, are Thy decrees ;
 Where is wine must needs be lees.”
 Justly of our progress, then,
 Vaunt we while in hole and den,
 Shut from light, in sin increased,
 Men sink backward to the beast—
God be merciful to us !

THE QUESTION

VOICELESS lives! that a lily may grow,
With pitiless spade-thrust I scatter you—
Worms and beetles destroyed by the blow;
And the lily I plant will unfold
Its beautiful bloom to the sky;
While you by its roots in the mould
Unaccounted, forgotten will lie—
Then whom do you, live or dead, matter to?

“AND ALL THE PEOPLE WEPT”

(*February 2nd, 1901*)

To God be given praise
For that, ere gloom oppressed
The evening of her days,
He gave His servant rest.

A sound of sorrow comes—
Of muffled bells o'erhead—
Deep-throated moan and roll of muted drums
Mourning the mighty dead;
And giving a common speech to grief intense
That hides its tears behind this outward show
And sad magnificence;
To thanks for good that came we know not
whence,
And now, we know not whither, hence must go,
Withdrawn by Him whose love is infinite.
This is a nation mourning for its dead—
For that great Queen whose love was, as the light
And kindly dew, on all her people shed;
Who, trusting in God's might,
Knew not dismay, nor ever in heart despaired,

When, till His time, the prayed-for was denied;
 Who with a mother's burden gravely fared
 Along the difficult path of kings unblamed—
 See, this stern-hearted England puts aside
 Its shame-faced pride of pride,
 And weeps her unashamed!

Was ever monarch mourned like this,
 When borne with footing slow
 The way that all must go?
 Afar the thunder of unchallenged fleets
 Roared and died down again;
 The world's metropolis
 Laid hushing hand on all its humming streets;
 The mighty of the earth stepped from their seats,
 Forgetful of old hate and slumbering feud,
 To do her honour, following in her train—
 Kings and the sons of kings whose pomp was
 vain
 And nought their proud estate
 Beside the grief of this vast multitude,
 As slowly down between
 Their silent ranks, through the last fortress gate,
 Forth to the leaguering powers of Death and
 Fate,
 In high surrender slowly passed the Queen.

Slow gun and muffled bell
 Of England's sorrowing tell,

And harsh sea-wandering winds the message blow
 Down all the boisterous paths his navies go,
 To where far-scattered his strong children dwell;
 And since where'er these labour, in each heart
 An England comes to birth,
 Now from a thousand thousand Englands, lo!
 The Queen goes forth—
 Goes forth and evermore is part
 Of that which lives in mountain silences,
 In far mysterious corners of the earth,
 In forests dim, and unsailed sunset seas,
 Luring them on with swift adventurous thought,
 With careless sails unfurled,
 And hearts unsatisfied,
 To seek they know not what—
 The dreamers and the doers of the world,
 Who, headstrong, choosing pathways of their
 own,
 Stumble on God's; and ever by ways untried
 Move to some end to all but Him unknown!

Oft are we told that England touched with age
 Confronts his lusty heirs—
 The nations—gathering round an heritage
 That shortly shall be theirs;
 That from beneath the palsied hands that clutch
 Seas island-gemmed, and lands remote and fair—
 The hands that in full strength grasped over-
 much—

The envious watchers, swift and bold, shall dare
 To snatch each one his share ;
 That that which Fate had set for him to do
 Is done or missed, and that the far-off seas
 Looking for masters new,
 Forgetful, shall acclaim new victories—
 As Tyre and Venice, England passes too.

Nay, nay, this rather is the truth,
 That England, strong in uncorrupted youth,
 Rejoicing in his strength, as yet
 But fumbling with his weapons—lacking skill,
 Untroubled vision and the balanced will—
 To his great task has scarce been set.
 Then when in last essay and proof of fight
 He learns at length the measure of his might,
 Lest Pride should tempt and whisper in the hour
 Of might, dominion, majesty and power,
 Though dead she shall be heard,
 Enshrined within the nation's memory,
 Speaking the temperate word,
 And pleading still with gentle urgency
 For humbleness and charity,
 For justice, mercy, truth, and purity.

The gentle lady passes to her rest,
 Carried with footing slow
 The way that all must go ;
 O would that all as she therein were blessed !

Yet to her heart, by latter trouble tried,
 Was one dear wish denied—
 That she might passing leave her realm in peace;
 But this might not be so,
 For not yet is the time when wars shall cease—
 Not yet! but who shall say,
 When all one winter's day
 The earth turned slowly to the sun's wan face,
 Wheeling his mighty bulk through silent space,
 Hushed kingdoms, mourning cities, empty marts,
 Is seen no augury here of peace ensured,
 Not by coercive arms and dominant power,
 Whereby, o'erawed, the sullen nations cower
 Dead to the ceaseless smarts
 Of long oppression till, grown ripe, the Hour—
 The red disastrous Hour of wrath outpoured,
 And all the little gained once more to win;
 But by the sense within all human hearts
 Of possible, common strands which Love shall
 spin
 To bind the limbs of War at point of birth,
 Whereby at last shall men see ushered in
 The endless truce of God upon the earth.

But now the end has come which seemed so far—
 So far remote that we, too young to mark
 The morning-clear ascension of her star,
 Could not pre-figure, as we gazed upon
 Its beautiful declining, dark so dark

As were a void wherein it no more shone.
 Silence has closed upon her, and we touch
 Friend's hand with hand, and pass with speechless
 lip,

We poorer by her love who loved us much ;
 She richer in her heavenly fellowship ;
 Nor grieve we less although we deem her gone
 With all that God demands the doing done,
 And all in man's sight worth the winning
 won—

(O, happy of whom this can be said at last !)
 Hark, for a space the lips of life are dumb,
 In the far distance moans the muted drum ;
 The dull streets empty fast
 Through which she passed ;
 The flags half-masted droop as though its will
 Had failed the wind, while on the world's far
 verge,
 Unmarked by our sad eyes,
 Lying a-welter in a fiery surge,
 The day in vast self-immolation dies !

Then let us render thanks to God who gives,
 As for the good which came we know not
 whence
 And now we know not whither hence departs,
 So too for that, though dead, she lives
 To wield unwavering influence
 Should ever our hearts

Falter when down the paths of empiry
 Comes the stern call to choose the difficult way—
 To shout God's "Nay,"
 Accepting chance of all disastrous fate,
 When loud the angry nations murmur "Aye."
 Whence, failing nought, fearful of nought save
 wrong,
 Shall our great work be done.
 This is her crowning glory—this: to be
 For ever throned within our hearts as one
 With those exalted souls which made us great,
 And kin with those strong hands which made us
 strong.
 This is the passing of the Queen:
 Thus she goes from us and is no more seen—
 Lays down the rule of life to wield instead
 The sceptre of the dead.

PRINTED BY R. FOLKARD AND SON,
22 DEVONSHIRE STREET, QUEEN SQUARE, BLOOMSBURY,
LONDON, W.C.



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